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(54) **ESD PROTECTION APPARATUS AND ELECTRICAL CIRCUIT INCLUDING SAME**

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(58) **Field of Classification Search** 257/173, 257/213, 355, 401, 500
See application file for complete search history.

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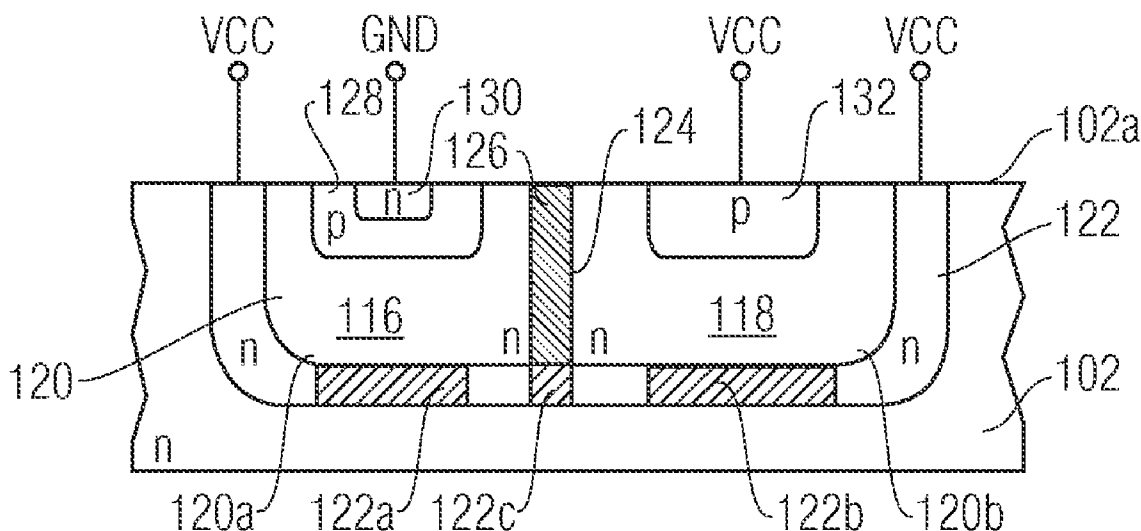
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An ESD protection apparatus includes a substrate, a transistor structure arranged in the substrate, and a diode structure arranged in the substrate, a high-resistance electrical connection being provided between the transistor structure and the diode structure in the substrate.

7 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



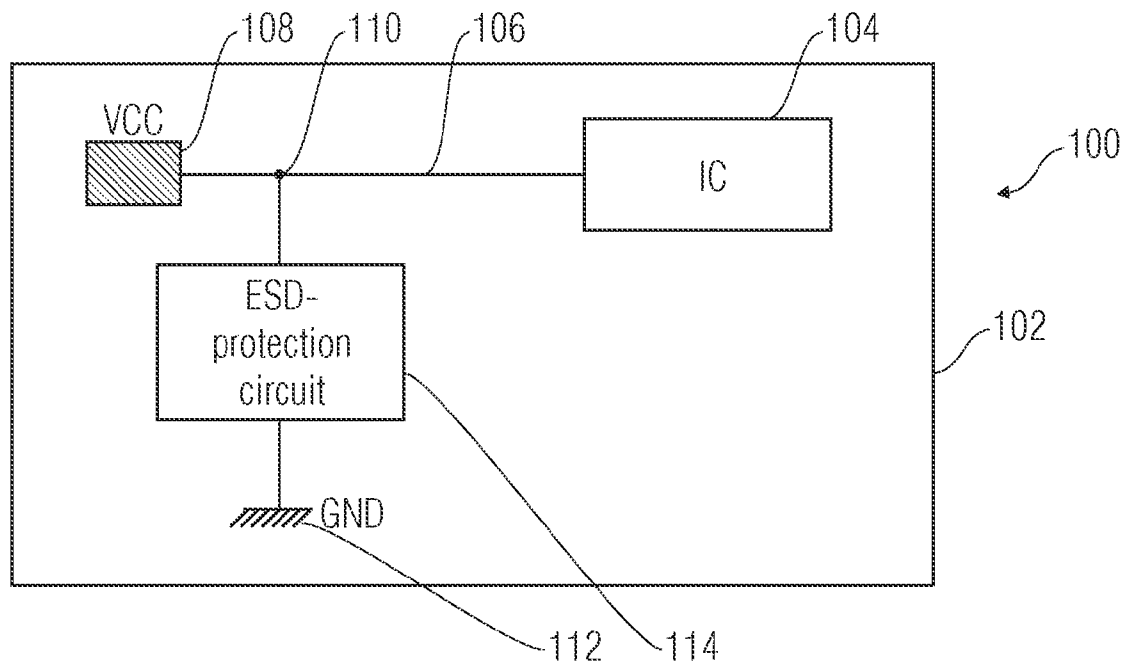


FIG 1A

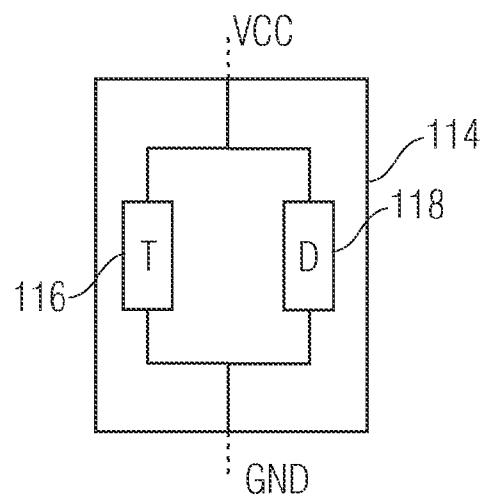


FIG 1B

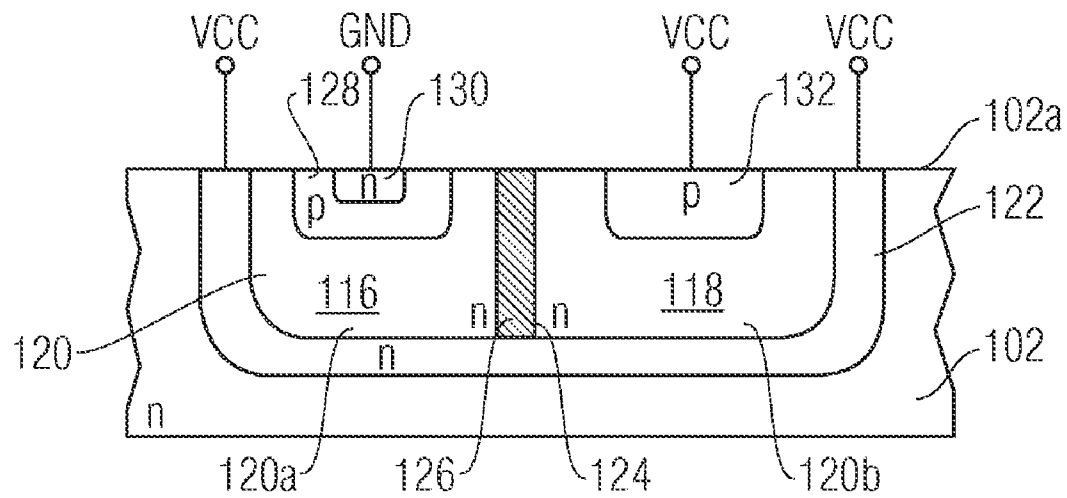


FIG 2

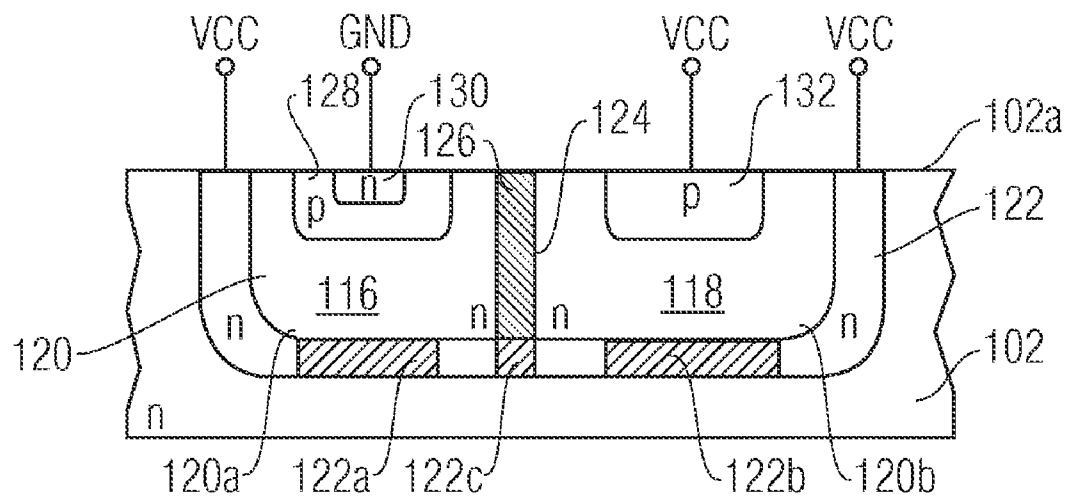
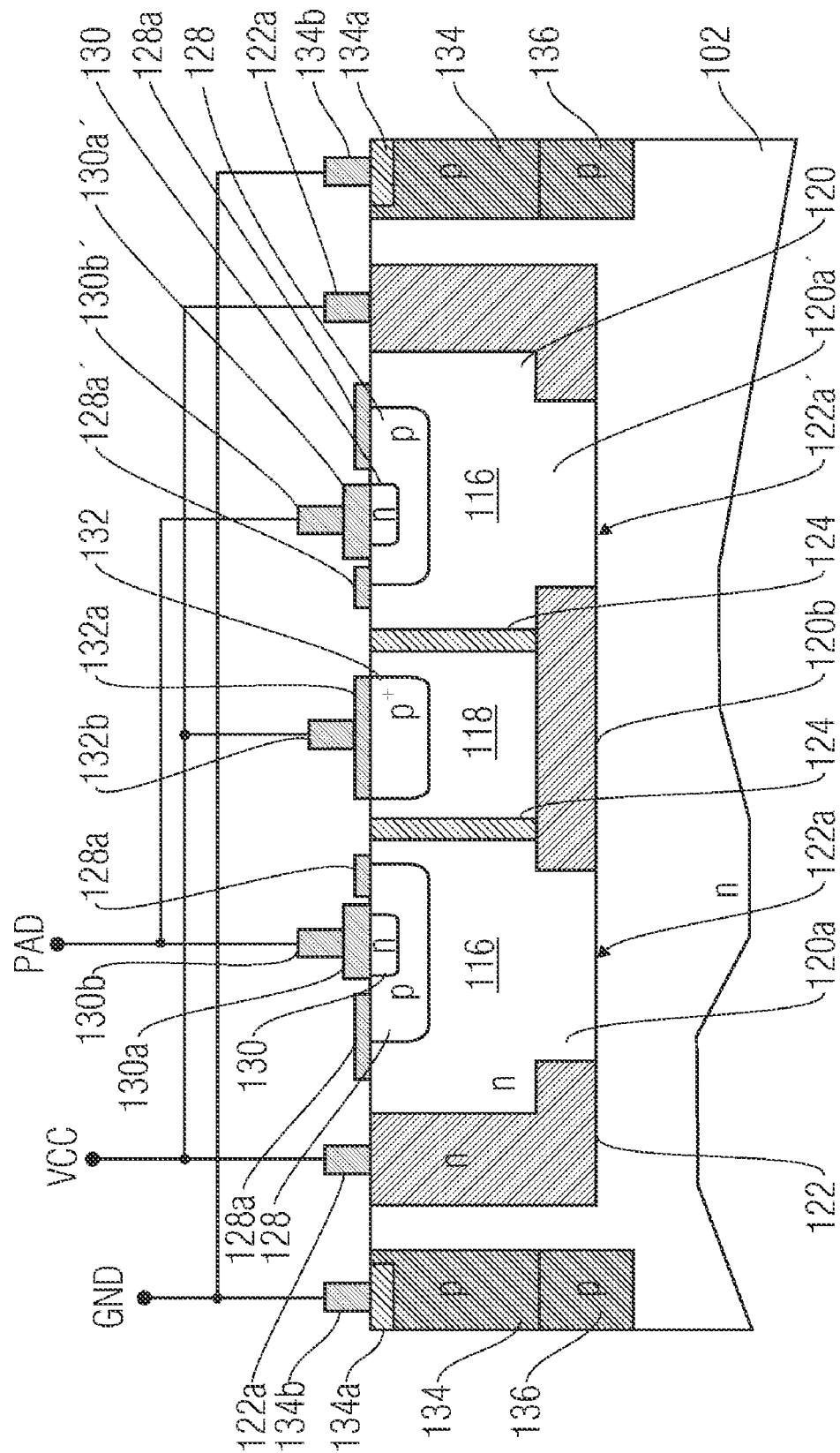


FIG 3



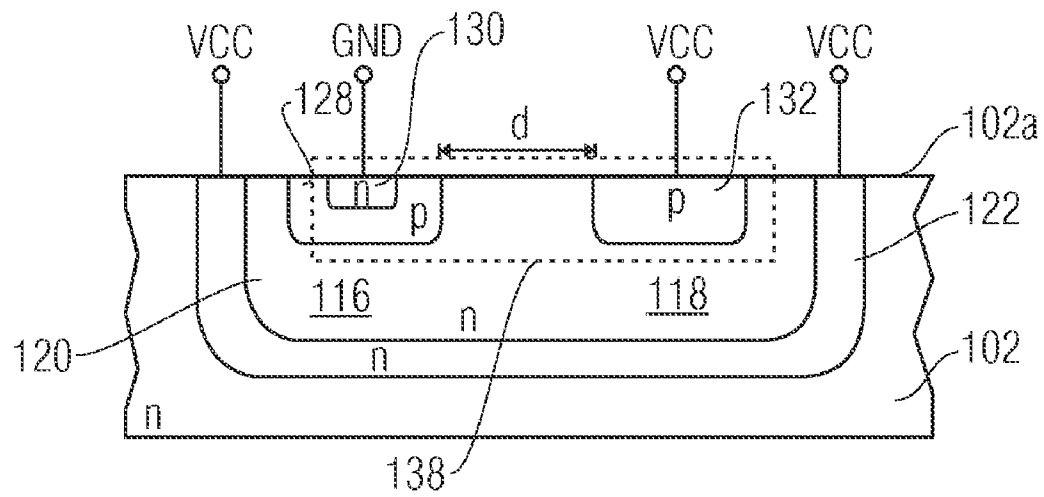


FIG 5

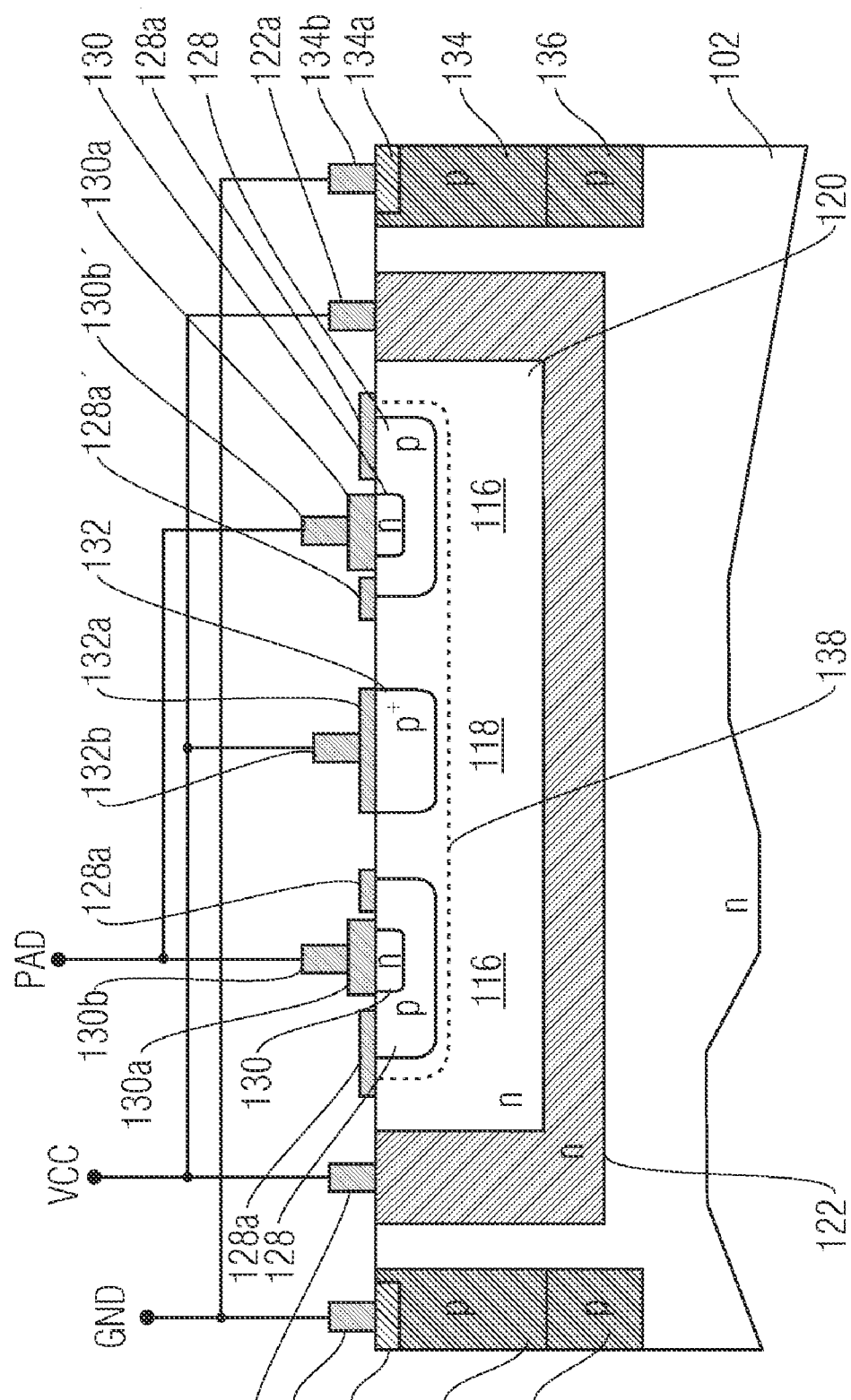


FIG 6

1

ESD PROTECTION APPARATUS AND ELECTRICAL CIRCUIT INCLUDING SAME

This application claims priority from German Patent Application No. 10 2007 006 853.2, which was filed on Feb. 12, 2007, and is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

Embodiments of the present invention relate to an ESD (electrostatic discharge) protection apparatus and to an electrical circuit including such an ESD protection device.

BACKGROUND

ESD protection apparatuses and/or ESD protection structures bypass, in an ESD case, the power of the ESD pulse around a device to be protected and thus make the ESD pulse harmless for the device to be protected. In electrical circuits, like, for example, integrated circuits, the ESD protection structure is connected to a pin to which the device to be protected within the circuit is connected. Exemplarily, this may be a signal pin by means of which predetermined signals can be applied to the internal circuit and/or the device to be protected. In the ESD case, an ESD pulse the power of which would result in a destruction of or considerable damage to the device to be protected is applied via this pin. The ESD protection structure is connected to ground or another suitable reference potential and/or to a supply voltage at the pin to be protected. In normal operation, the ESD protection structure is “electrically invisible”, so that the device to be protected behaves as if there were no ESD protection structure. In the ESD case, the ESD protection structure clamps the smallest voltage possible, this clamping voltage also being across the parallel path to be protected. The high current impressed by an ESD pulse is drained to ground or the suitable reference potential.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of the invention provide an ESD protection apparatus that includes a substrate, a transistor structure arranged in the substrate, a diode structure arranged in the substrate, and a high-resistance electrical connection between the transistor structure and the diode structure arranged in the substrate.

A further embodiment of the invention provides an ESD protection apparatus with a transistor structure arranged in a substrate, and a diode structure arranged in the substrate. A semiconductor material is arranged between the transistor structure and the diode structure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Embodiments of the invention will be discussed subsequently referring to the appended drawings, in which:

FIG. 1A is a schematic illustration of an electrical circuit including an ESD protection circuit;

FIG. 1B is an enlarged illustration of the ESD protection circuit of FIG. 1A;

FIG. 2 shows a setup of the ESD protection circuit of FIG. 1B;

FIG. 3 shows a setup of an ESD protection circuit according to embodiments of the invention;

FIG. 4 shows a setup of the ESD protection circuit according to further embodiments of the invention;

2

FIG. 5 shows a setup of an ESD protection circuit according to further embodiments of the invention; and

FIG. 6 shows a setup of an ESD protection circuit according to still further embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

Embodiments of the invention provide an ESD protection apparatus comprising a substrate, a transistor structure arranged in the substrate, a diode structure arranged in the substrate, and a high-resistance electrical connection between the transistor structure and the diode structure arranged in the substrate.

Further embodiments of the invention provide a protection apparatus comprising a substrate, an epitaxial well arranged in the substrate and defining a collector region of a bipolar transistor, a first base region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the epitaxial well, a second base region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the epitaxial well laterally offset to the first base region, a first emitter region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the first base region, a second emitter region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the second base region, a first region of a diode arranged in the epitaxial well between the first and second base regions, the epitaxial well further defining a second region of the diode, and a buried layer arranged in the substrate between the epitaxial well and the substrate, the buried layer defining a high-resistance electrical connection between the bipolar transistor and the diode.

Further embodiments of the invention provide an apparatus for ESD protection comprising first means which is active in an ESD case, second means for draining the current present in the ESD case, the first means in the ESD case activating the second means to drain the current, and third means providing a high-resistance electrical connection between the first and second means.

Further embodiments of the invention provide an ESD protection apparatus comprising a transistor structure arranged in a substrate, and a diode structure arranged in the structure, a semiconductor material being arranged between the transistor structure and the diode structure.

Further embodiments of the invention provide an ESD protection apparatus comprising a substrate, an epitaxial well arranged in the substrate and defining a collector region of a bipolar transistor, a first base region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the epitaxial well, a second base region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the epitaxial well laterally offset to the first base region, a first emitter region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the first base region, a second emitter region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the second base region, a first region of a diode arranged in the epitaxial well between the first and second base regions, the epitaxial well further defining a second region of the diode, and a buried layer arranged in the substrate between the epitaxial well and the substrate.

Further embodiments of the invention provide an apparatus for ESD protection comprising first means which is active in an ESD case, and second means for draining the current present in the ESD case, the first means activating the second means to drain the current, the first and second means being implemented to provide in the ESD case a thyristor-like structure for draining the current.

Further embodiments of the invention provide an electrical circuit comprising a first terminal, a second terminal, an internal circuit connected to the first terminal, and an ESD protection apparatus according to embodiments of the invention connected between the first terminal and the second terminal.

3

FIG. 1A shows an exemplary schematic illustration of an electrical circuit which in its entirety is provided with the reference numeral **100** and exemplarily includes a substrate **102**. The electrical circuit **100** includes an integrated circuit **104** arranged on or in the substrate **102** which is connected to a terminal **108** for applying a signal VCC via a signal line **106**. The signal line **106** includes a node **110**, and an ESD protection circuit **114** is connected between the node **110** and a ground terminal **112** (GND). The electrical circuit shown in FIG. 1A is not limited to the design shown, wherein a plurality of signal lines **106** as well as a plurality of terminals **108** may be provided depending on the design of the integrated circuit **104**, corresponding ESD protection circuits being provided to protect the integrated circuit **104**. In addition, the design according to FIG. 1A is not limited to using an integrated circuit, but can be applied, too, in electrical circuits **100** in general, wherein other devices to be protected are provided instead of the integrated circuit **104**, i.e., devices which may be damaged or even destroyed in the case of high currents in an ESD pulse coupled into the circuit **100** via the terminal **108**. In addition, the arrangement shown in FIG. 1A can be arranged in a casing and/or the substrate may be cast into a casing, wherein in this case at least the terminal **108** is exposed to be able to apply the signals for operating the integrated circuit **104**.

The ESD protection circuit **114** serves to protect the integrated circuit **104** during a so-called ESD case. During an ESD case, an ESD pulse is coupled into the circuit **100** via the terminal **108** due to an electrostatic discharge (ESD), wherein the ESD pulse may result in such high currents that the integrated circuit **104** may be damaged permanently or even be destroyed completely. Since the ESD protection circuit **114** is only active in this ESD case, it is designed not to break down and additionally to be "electrically invisible" during normal operation of the integrated circuit **104** with the signal levels applied there. At the same time, the ESD protection circuit **114** has to be as low-resistance as possible in the ESD case to bypass the high current reliably around the integrated circuit **104** directly to ground **112**. For this reason, the ESD protection circuit **114** is designed to be able to take two voltage states.

Instead of the arrangement of the ESD protection circuit **114** between the terminals VCC and GND shown in FIG. 1, it is generally possible for the ESD protection circuit **114** to be arranged between any two pins of a circuit, the pins being at different potentials.

FIG. 1B shows a design of the ESD protection circuit **114** of FIG. 1A including a bipolar transistor **116** connected between the terminal **108** and ground **112**. In addition, the ESD protection circuit **114** includes a diode **118** which is also connected between the terminal **108** and ground **112**. The bipolar transistor **116** here is designed to exhibit the dielectric strength necessary in normal operation, i.e., not to break down and to be electrically invisible at the operating point of the integrated circuit **104** and with the currents and voltages applied there.

In the ESD case, the bipolar transistor **116** causes the diode **118** to be switched on, to completely pass on the current flowing then to the diode **118** which in the high-current case is low-resistance. Since the current will in this case only flow via the low-resistance diode **118**, the entire protection structure **114** is low-resistance. Although FIG. 1B mentions a bipolar transistor and a diode, other suitable circuit elements may also be employed here, the first circuit element **116** in the ESD case causing the second element **118** to be switched on for providing the low-resistance path between the terminal **108** and ground **112** or the reference potential **112**. It is to be

4

pointed out here that, in general, transistor structures, such as, among other things, field-effect transistors (like MOS structures), and diode structures may be employed instead of the bipolar transistor and the diode described.

The two individual elements **116** and **118** shown in FIG. 1B in cooperation form a functional complete ESD protection structure.

FIG. 2 shows the setup of an ESD protection circuit as shown in FIG. 1B. In FIG. 2 the substrate **102**, which is also shown in FIG. 1A, is shown, thereby indicating that the ESD protection circuit may be formed integrally with the integrated circuit **104** in a common substrate. However, the invention is not limited to such a design and, rather, includes designs where the ESD protection circuit **114** is designed as an individual element, i.e., is formed separately in an individual substrate, to form an ESD protection chip with which an electrical circuit similar to that shown in FIG. 1 can be equipped for a necessary ESD protection. It is to be pointed out here that the following illustrations of the ESD protection circuit setup are not to scale but are shown in an enlarged manner for the benefit of an improved representation.

In FIG. 2, the substrate **102** is, for example, a silicon substrate having an n-type doping. An epitaxially grown semiconductor region **120** having an n-type doping (EPI well) as well as a buried n layer **122** which has been generated subsequently by means of implantation in the substrate **102** for producing the EPI well **120** are shown in the substrate **102**. A trench **124** extending from a top surface **126** of the substrate down to the buried n layer **122** and filled with an electrically insulating material **126**, like, for example, an oxide, is formed in the EPI well **120**. Instead of the trench design shown, the trench may also be provided in such a manner that it extends from the substrate surface **102a** by a predetermined distance in the direction of the substrate, without reaching the buried layer. The EPI well is divided by the trench **124** into a first region **120a** and a second region **120b**. In the first region **120a** of the EPI well **120**, a first p-doped region **128** is formed, in which in turn an n-doped region **130** is formed. Additionally, a p-doped region **132** is formed in the second region **120b** of the EPI well **120**.

An emitter **130**, a base **128** and a collector **120a** of the npn bipolar transistor **116** are defined by the regions defined in the first region **120a** of the EPI well **120**. In the ESD protection structure described in FIG. 2, the base terminal of the bipolar transistor structure **116** is "floating", i.e., has no potential provided to it. Alternatively, the base terminal may be connected to a predetermined reference potential. In the second region **120b** of the EPI well **120**, a p-zone of the diode **118** is defined by the region **132** and the n-zone of the diode **118** is defined by the n-region **120b**.

Although in FIG. 2 an ESD circuit including n-regions and p-regions is described, it is to be pointed out that the invention is not limited to this design. Rather, the n-regions and the p-regions may be exchanged to exemplarily define a pnp bipolar transistor. A design where a silicon substrate and different doped silicon layers are used has been described in FIG. 2. The invention is not limited to such a design and other suitable materials may be used for producing the structure shown in FIG. 2. In general, all well-known semiconductor materials, such as, for example, InP, GaAs, GaC, GaN, Ge, may be used.

When using the arrangement shown in FIG. 2, for example, in a circuit of FIG. 1, the emitter **130** of the bipolar transistor structure **116** is connected to the reference potential terminal GND, like, for example, ground, and the buried layer **122** and the p-zone of the diode structure **118** are connected to the

terminal **108** (VCC) to drain, in the ESD case, the ESD pulse via the circuit element **114** to ground **112** and protect the device **104**.

The two individual devices **116** and **118** shown in FIG. 2 in cooperation form the functional complete ESD protection element. The two devices **116** and **118** are arranged in the substrate **102**. As is conventional in the field of manufacturing integrated circuits, the elements are separated and electrically insulated from each other by the trench **124**. The two devices are connected to each other via the buried n-layer **122**, wherein the buried layer **122** is selected to be as low-resistance as possible in order to be able to drain, in a high-current case, the current from the terminal VCC to the ground terminal GND in a low-resistance manner. This necessitates a relatively high voltage for switching on the low-resistance element **118**, like, for example, the diode **118**. In an exemplary case, around 13 volts are necessary for this, corresponding to a very high clamping voltage which is also applied to the device **104** to be protected.

Embodiments of the invention provide an ESD protection structure where the electrical connection between a transistor structure, like, for example, an npn bipolar transistor, and a diode structure within a substrate, like, for example, a silicon substrate, is significantly more high-resistance, which according to embodiments of the invention is achieved by leaving out the buried layer **122** (see FIG. 2) partly below the devices, i.e., the bipolar transistor and/or the diode device. When manufacturing, this may, for example, be achieved by a suitably selected implantation mask, no disadvantages resulting for manufacturing other devices during the manufacturing process. Embodiments of the invention improve the ESD protection of the protective structure by a factor of 2 to 3 compared to an arrangement as is shown in FIG. 2.

When omitting and/or reducing the area of the buried layer **122** below the ESD protection structure, the current flowing after the transistor structure breakdown produces a higher voltage at the diode structure such that it will switch already at lower currents and thus at a lower clamping voltage in the flow direction so that the high clamping voltage mentioned before which is also applied to the device **104** to be protected (see FIG. 1) is avoided.

FIG. 3 shows the setup of an ESD protection circuit according to embodiments of the invention, wherein same elements already described referring to FIG. 2 are provided with the same reference numerals and are not described again. In FIG. 3, the buried n-layer **122** is shown again, wherein, however, a structuring of the n-layer **122** is indicated here by the regions **122a**, **122b** and **122c**, wherein one, several or all the regions **122a** to **122c** may be left out here according to embodiments, i.e., represent regions where no implantation and/or no introduction of dopants has taken place in order to form the layer **122** and thus either the substrate material of the substrate **102** or the material of the EPI well **120** remains. Alternatively, instead of the recesses, it may also be provided for the thickness of the n-layer **122** to be reduced in the region below the active elements **116** and/or **118** as compared to the other regions, wherein both the recesses and the reduced thickness result in an increase in the resistance between the two elements **116** and **118**, i.e., result in a high-resistance connection.

An ESD protection structure according to FIG. 2 having the buried layer **122** shown allows the device **104** to be protected, exemplarily up to 2000 volts. If the region of the n-layer **122** beneath the bipolar transistor **116** is dispensed with, i.e. if a recess is provided in the region **122a**, the protection is improved to voltages of more than about 5000 volts.

Embodiments of the invention include a multi-layered buried layer comprising two or more (a plurality of) layers. The layers of the multi-layered buried layer include an increasing doping, starting at the layer adjacent to the substrate towards the EPI well. The multi-layered buried layer is either structured completely, for example, by recesses where all layers have been removed partly, or is structured partly, i.e., by forming recesses in one or several layers.

FIG. 4 shows further embodiments of the invention where a high-resistance connection is provided between the two elements **116** and **118**. In FIG. 4, elements having been described already referring to FIGS. 2 and 3 are provided with the same reference numerals. The difference to the setup of FIG. 3 is that FIG. 4 shows an npn bipolar transistor having two fingers. The EPI well **120** in the circuit shown in FIG. 4 is divided into regions **120a**, **120b** and **120a'**, wherein the elements of the transistor described referring to FIG. 3, namely the base **128**, the emitter **130** and the collector **120a**, are formed in the region **120a**. The elements of the second finger of the transistor, namely the base **128'**, the emitter **130'** and the collector **120a'**, are formed in the region **120a'**. The diode **118** is formed between the two fingers, wherein the trench **124** insulates the diode from the adjacent regions of the transistor structure. It is further shown in FIG. 4 that a p-well **134** and a buried p-layer **136** are formed in the n-substrate **102**. In FIG. 4, additionally the terminals of the individual sections mentioned before are shown and, as can be seen, when using the structure, like in a circuit of FIG. 1, the p-well **134** is connected to the reference potential GND. The emitter terminals are connected to the terminal PAD. The terminals PAD and GND may be connected to each other or be guided together or separately to an external terminal or to different external terminals, like, for example, an external ground line, and connected thereto. The base terminals of the bipolar transistor in turn are floating and the terminal VCC is connected to the buried n-layer and to the p-zone of the diode **118**. FIG. 4 additionally shows the floating base contacts **128a** and **128a'**, the emitter contacts **130a** and **130a'** and the diode contact **132a**. These contacts are, for example, made of polysilicon. Any other suitable contact material may be used instead of polysilicon. Exemplarily, a suitable doping (e.g. phosphorous or boron) may be introduced by means of implantation. Alternatively, the contacts may be grown epitaxially.

The contacts **130b**, **130b'**, **132b**, **134b**, **134b'** for a connection to VCC, PAD and GND which are exemplarily made of aluminum, are additionally shown schematically. Generally, any electrically conducting materials may be used, like, for example, Au, Cu, W.

The structure shown in FIG. 4 includes the vertical two-finger npn bipolar transistor which in normal operation blocks at around 4.5 volts and makes the protection structure shown in FIG. 4 "electrically invisible" when being used, for example, in a circuit according to FIG. 1. In the ESD case, the current flow through the broken-down npn transistor **116** switches on the diode **118** to thus provide a low-resistance current path from the terminal VCC via the ESD protection structure to the reference potential GND. As is shown in FIG. 4, the regions of the n-layers **122a** and **122a'** below the finger are left out, i.e., have been masked in the process of implantation such that no dopant has been introduced here, so that "no buried n-layer" has been produced, the result being the high-resistance connection between the transistor and the diode mentioned before for switching on the diode early.

In the examples described before, a structure where the EPI well **120** comprises a trench **124** providing electrical insulation between the first element **116** and the second element **118** has been discussed. Alternatively, this insulation may be dis-

pensed with, provided a sufficiently large distance between the two elements is maintained, the distance being selected such that a minimum distance will form in order to have only a small resistance on the drain distance forming in the ESD case. At the same time, the distance is selected such that a breakdown voltage on the distance from the diode to the base of the transistor is greater than the breakdown voltage V_{CEO} of the transistor.

Although embodiments, where a transistor structure having two fingers used, have been described referring to FIG. 4, it is to be pointed out that the invention is not limited to this, but rather even transistor structures having several fingers, like, for example, 3, 4 or more fingers, may be used.

An ESD circuit structure where the EPI well **120** is divided by the trench **124** to electrically separate the diode structure **118** and the transistor structure **116** has been described referring to FIG. 2. The design shown referring to FIGS. 2 to 4 is a conventional one in IC (integrated circuit) technology according to which different elements are electrically insulated from one another to avoid mutual influence. The LOCOS process or the STI (shallow trench isolation) process, for example, are conventional insulation processes in IC technology. All the insulation methods are characterized in that they remove a greater or smaller amount of material (like, for example, silicon) from the surface **102a** of the substrate **102** and transform it to an oxide with which the trench **124** is filled. However, this oxide usually removes the lateral current path which has the lowest doping and would offer the lowest resistance in a high-current case due to the small collision rate at the dopant atoms.

Further embodiments of the invention provide an ESD structure where an insulation between the two individual elements, exemplarily between the transistor and the diode, is dispensed with.

FIG. 5 shows further embodiments of the invention, wherein, like in the descriptions of the above figures, elements having the same effect will be provided with the same reference numerals and not be described again.

The substrate **102** is shown in FIG. 5, wherein, as can be seen, no trench structure **124**, **126** is provided here. In FIG. 5, the distance between the bipolar transistor **116** and the diode **118** is indicated by d. As described above, the distance d is selected such that the result is a minimum distance in order to have only a small resistance on the resulting drain distance in the ESD case. At the same time, the distance is selected such that a breakdown voltage on the distance from the diode to the base of the transistor is greater than the breakdown voltage V_{CEO} of the transistor.

As can be seen from FIG. 5, the result between the two elements **116**, **118** is a continuous low-resistance path made of a semiconductor material, like, for example, silicon, with no interruptions by an oxide. Indicated in broken lines in FIG. 5 is the region **138** forming a lateral thyristor structure between the terminal VCC connected to the region **132** and the ground terminal GND connected to the region **130**. The structure shown in FIG. 5 includes the vertical npn bipolar transistor **116** which in normal operation blocks at, for example, about 4.5 volts and provides for the protection structure shown in FIG. 5 for the circuit **104** of FIG. 1 to be "electrically invisible". The distance d can be selected such that, in a first phase when an ESD pulse occurs, the transistor **116** and/or the diode **118** perform a respective function or functionality and that, in a second phase of the ESD case, the thyristor-like behavior is caused.

In the ESD case, the increasing current flow through the npn transistor will result in a breakdown thereof, which in turn will result in switching the current flow to the diode **118**

which forms the laterally implemented thyristor structure (pnpn structure) together with the npn transistor. With a further increase in current, this thyristor-like structure will be ignited so that the region **138**, i.e., the thyristor, will become low-resistance, for example, about 2.5 volts, and thus take up and drain the entire ESD current to ground.

A shallow trench insulation between the individual devices, as is, for example, shown in FIG. 2, results in a protection between about 1300 V and about 2450 V. According to embodiments of the invention, as has been described referring to FIG. 5, an improvement in protection to about 3000 V to about 5000 V is achieved when omitting the insulation.

FIG. 6 shows further embodiments of the invention, similar to FIG. 4, wherein again similar elements are provided with the same reference numerals. As can be seen, no trench has been inserted in FIG. 6 for insulating the diode element **118** from the transistor element and the interruptions of the buried n-layer **122** shown in FIG. 4 are not provided here either.

Further embodiments of the invention relate to a combination of the embodiments described referring to FIGS. 3 and 4 and/or referring to FIGS. 5 and 6 in which, in addition to omitting the insulation according to FIGS. 5 and 6, the high-resistance connection described referring to FIGS. 3 and 4 between the elements is provided.

The embodiments of the invention described referring to FIGS. 3 to 6 are, for example, used as the ESD protection apparatus **114** in FIG. 1. In general, the ESD protection apparatus according to embodiments of the invention can be applied in all electrical circuits where the devices used in the circuit and/or circuits must be protected from high-current pulses.

A setup based on an n-substrate comprising a buried n-layer and an n-EPI well has been discussed when describing the embodiments of the invention. NPN bipolar transistor structure and pn diode structures are formed in the substrate formed in this way. It is obvious for those skilled in the art that the invention is not restricted to such a design, but that, instead of an n-substrate, a p-doped substrate in which a buried p-layer and a p-EPI well are formed may be employed so that a pnp transistor is formed instead of an npn transistor. Instead of introducing the buried layer and/or EPI well into the substrate **102**, it may also be provided for the buried layer **122** to be arranged on a surface **102a** of the substrate, on which in turn an epitaxial layer is applied, the buried EPI layer then being contacted by suitable through-contactings through the EPI layer to allow a connection to VCC. Additionally, the invention is not limited to a silicon material, rather all other common semiconductor materials, like, for example, Si, Ge, GaAs, InP, GaC, may be employed.

Instead of arranging the ESD protection circuit between the terminals VCC and GND or PAD, the ESD protection circuit may generally be arranged between any two pins of a circuit which are at different potentials.

While this invention has been described in terms of several embodiments, there are alterations, permutations, and equivalents which fall within the scope of this invention. It should also be noted that there are many alternative ways of implementing the methods and compositions of the present invention. It is therefore intended that the following appended claims be interpreted as including all such alterations, permutations, and equivalents as fall within the true spirit and scope of the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An ESD protection apparatus comprising:
 - a substrate;
 - a semiconductor layer arranged in or on the substrate;

9

a buried layer arranged in or on the substrate, wherein the buried layer is arranged between the semiconductor layer and the substrate, and wherein the buried layer has a higher dopant concentration than the semiconductor layer;

a vertical transistor structure arranged in the semiconductor layer;

a diode structure arranged in the semiconductor layer;

wherein the transistor structure and the diode structure are arranged spaced apart from each other by a predetermined distance with no insulating material therebetween, wherein the predetermined distance is selected such that a breakdown voltage on the distance from the diode structure to a base of the transistor structure is greater than the breakdown voltage of the transistor structure.

2. An ESD protection apparatus comprising:

a substrate;

an epitaxial well arranged in the substrate and defining a collector region of a bipolar transistor;

a first base region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the epitaxial well;

a second base region of the bipolar transistor arranged laterally offset to the first base region in the epitaxial well;

a first emitter region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the first base region;

a second emitter region of the bipolar transistor arranged in the second base region;

a first region of a diode arranged in the epitaxial well between the first and second base regions, the epitaxial well further defining a second region of the diode; and a buried layer arranged in the substrate between the epitaxial well and the substrate

wherein the first region of the diode is spaced apart from the first base region and from the second base region by a predetermined distance, wherein the predetermined distance is selected such that a breakdown voltage on the distance from the diode to the first base region and on the

10

distance from the diode to the second base region is greater than the breakdown voltage of the respective bipolar transistor.

3. A semiconductor structure comprising:

a semiconductor body;

a transistor structure disposed in the semiconductor body, the transistor structure including first, second and third doped regions, the first doped region being spaced from the third doped region by the second doped region;

a diode structure disposed in the semiconductor body, the diode structure including a first doped region and a second doped region adjacent the first doped region; and

a semiconductor region disposed in the semiconductor body and extending between the first doped region of the transistor structure and the first doped region of the diode structure,

wherein the transistor structure and the diode structure are spaced from each other by a predetermined distance with no insulating material therebetween, wherein the predetermined distance is selected such that a breakdown voltage on the distance from the diode structure to a base of the transistor structure is greater than the breakdown voltage of the transistor structure.

4. The semiconductor structure according to claim 3, wherein the transistor structure is located in a first region of the semiconductor body and the diode structure is arranged in a second region of the semiconductor body, the second region being laterally spaced from the first region.

5. The semiconductor structure according to claim 3, wherein the transistor structure includes a multi-finger structure, the narrow portion of the buried layer located below fingers of the transistor structure.

6. The semiconductor structure according to claim 3, further comprising a buried layer disposed in the semiconductor body beneath the transistor structure and the diode structure.

7. The semiconductor structure according to claim 6, wherein the semiconductor region is part of the buried layer.

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